

DMAT San Diego CA-4

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DMAT San Diego CA-4 is a disaster medical assistance team sponsored by the UCSD Medical Center since 1991. It was at that time that I was approached by the local Federal Coordinating Center for the National Disaster Medical System, and was asked if I would be interested in helping to form a local DMAT. I was likely asked based on my disaster preparedness activities over the years, including organizing a UCSD team to participate in the 1990 San Diego International Airport Multi casualty Exercise at Lindberg Field, having been the disaster control officer at UCSD for many years, and being involved in getting UCSD Medical Center to sign on as an NDMS-participating receiving hospital, back in 1987. I have been the team organizer and Commander since its inception. As an Emergency Medicine physician, I have always felt that volunteering to support disaster medical relief operations was the penultimate challenge for physicians in my own, and many other specialties, including but not limited to trauma surgery, international medicine, renal dialysis, family medicine, general surgery, pediatrics, and psychiatry. It is in these areas that the greatest needs exist immediately following a disaster. As the concern for chemical and biological terrorism increases, so too does the additional need for specialists in toxicology and infectious diseases emerge. The lessons of the Sarin Gas attacks in Matsumoto and Tokyo, Japan, and the Terrorist bombs at the World Trade Center in NYC and the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City gave us an idea of the magnitude of events possible in the techno-times of today.

The following questions and answers best describe the NDMS program and the involvement of DMAT CA-4:

What does DMAT stand for?

DMAT is the acronym for Disaster Medical Assistance Team.

What is NDMS?

NDMS is the acronym for the National Disaster Medical System. It is a partnership of four agencies that represent the Federal response to disasters when the need for local, state and territory medical resources exceeds availability. The U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS), in the Dept. Of Health Services, is the leader of that response under the Federal Response Plan, Emergency Support Function (ESF) #8, Health and Medical Services, and is supported by the Department of Veterans Affairs, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

Why is DMAT San Diego designated "CA-4?"

DMAT San Diego CA-4 is the 4th California DMAT to have signed an MOU (memorandum of understanding) with NDMS to respond to domestic disasters in the continental U.S. and its possessions. It is currently categorized as a Level 1 team, which means it agrees to activate and be prepared for deployment within 6 to 12 hours of a request.

DMAT CA-4 is a voluntary organization, and subsists under the umbrella of our sponsors. Fund raising events include a Walk-A-Thon, annual dues from member, and some First Aid Stations for local events. The team normally receives no cash funds from the Federal Government, and members are not paid for their participation in exercises, meetings or managing the basic supply load. Most of the property used by CA-4 is Federal property, and the rest is obtained by the team through donations in kind or through purchase.

What kinds of Missions will DMATs respond to?

In the event of a significant manmade or natural declared disaster, NDMS can activate individual DMATs, which are locally organized volunteer medical teams, for several kinds of mission for which they train: the establishment and staffing of a **Patient Field Treatment site; A Regional Evacuation Point**, where patients will be managed as they are prepared for flights to other cities when the ability of the local EMS/hospital system cannot cope with needs; or a **Patient Reception Point**, where patients who have been flown to another city will be received and examined, by a DMAT in a receiving city, and integrated into the new local EMS System.

In addition, if the entire primary care system of an area is destroyed, DMATs can be activated to deliver **Primary Care**, either as a freestanding unit or in shelters until the local area can restore such a critical function. When hospitals have been severely affected, or damaged, DMATs can respond to perform **Hospital Staff Relief**, or they can assist in hospital evacuations. In fact, this last mission is the most frequent one given to DMATs

What does the Sponsor do?

Each DMAT has a sponsor for recruiting team members, providing training and educational opportunities, and handling basic administrative needs. **The University of California, San Diego Medical Center** has been the primary sponsor for CA-4 since our founding, and we are currently in negotiations to take on a second sponsor, **International Relief Teams of San Diego**, and merge with the public health DMAT, CA-8, that they have been sponsoring.

What kinds of volunteers are on DMAT San Diego CA-4?

There is a wide variety of skilled professionals on our DMAT, each contributing to the goal of being able to set up a medical team which can be self sufficient in a disaster area for up to 72 hours. In the medical area, our team has a pool of **physicians, nurses and nurse practitioners, EMTs, paramedics, pharmacy techs, dentists, respiratory therapists, social workers and psychologists**, and other allied personnel, to be able to supply medical care in an austere environment. Other **support personnel** are needed to enable the medical team to do our job. These include personnel in the areas of **communications, security, medical supply and logistics, environmental health specialists and sanitarians**.

There is need for pharmacists, electricians, forklift operators, HAZMAT cargo specialists, other logistics personnel, and recruitment is ongoing.

Credit must be given to local employers, who permit their employees who are team members to depart for 10 to 14 day missions, once shift coverage is assured. The efforts of such employers,

in addition to the UCSD Medical Center, such as American Medical Response, San Diego Fire and Life Safety Services, the Scripps Hospitals and Sharp Hospital systems, and many others too numerous to mention are truly appreciated, since it enables us to field our team on short notice when asked.

What does being a member entail?

The team has monthly meetings and at least one or two major field exercises per year. Some members have participated in the Annual Meetings of NDMS. There are yearly dues. Members must purchase their own uniforms and personal supplies. It is anticipated that they will make every effort to adjust their schedules so they can deploy in the event of an activation.

If activated federally, each member is paid a stipend based on their job category, becoming an employee of the Public Health Service for the period of deployment. Their state professional license becomes federalized, allowing the practice of medicine and nursing of the performance of EMT activities within the scope of their practice in all US states and territories.

DMAT CA-4 is severely short of physicians, particularly in the fields mentioned above, as the HMOs have not been willing to release physicians to participate in this kind of volunteerism, and the financial cuts to physician's incomes have resulted in decreased ability to take off from coverage time to deploy. It has been extremely difficult to recruit physicians, and new and innovative ways of getting physicians free to deploy with our team are being sought. Interested physicians are urged to apply immediately, and will be assured unique, memorable missions in high profile disasters in the future. There is an opportunity to set up specialty teams, such as a pediatrics or a trauma specialty team, or even a dialysis specialty team, if an individual, group or hospital is interested. Please contact me with your ideas and group physician availability.

What deployments has CA-4 gone on?

The following is the list of Federal activations of our team. Each is an article unto itself.

Northridge Earthquake,

Hospital staff relief, and Primary Care Clinic,

Granada Hills Community Hospital, Granada Hills, CA

MidValley Comprehensive Health Care Clinic, Van Nuys, California, January 17-22, 1994

Centennial Olympic Games,

Atlanta, Georgia, July-August, 1996

Northern California Floods,

Yuba County, California, January 2-3, 1997

Red River of the North Floods,

Grand Forks, North Dakota

Hospital staff relief, ER augmentation, Disaster Worker Clinic and Shelter Care, Grand Forks Air Force Base, ND

Cando, ND April 20-28, 1997

Hurricane Georges

Prestaging for potential missions, Barksdale Air Force Base, Shreveport, Louisiana

Sept. 27-30, 1998

Hospital staff relief, Gov. Juan F.

Luis Hospital Medical Center, St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands October 2-9, 1998

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Where do I call to get an application?

Call the CA-4 Personnel Director,

Randy Landenberger: at Tel: (619) 462-5092.